



# Operation RIO Update

23 January 2004

Russell Holeman, SWT, provides updates to the news media during an interview in Iraq. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Photo)

*An update for all SWD employees and Operation RIO volunteers supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.*

**Mission Update:** The stand-up of the Gulf Region Division (Provisional) will reach initial operating capability on Sunday, 25 January 2004. With the achievement of this major milestone, Task Force Restore Iraqi Oil will become the Oil Directorate within the Division. For the most part, all the personnel positions will remain the same. Southwestern Division retains responsibility for staffing the "oil related" positions within the GRD as well as oil contracting support. Overall, the GRD will consist of a Division Headquarters led by MG Ron Johnson as the Division Commander, and COL(P) Joe Schroedel as the Deputy Commanding General. COL Lem DuBose will continue as the Director of the Oil Directorate. The GRD will also have three Districts -- North, Central and South. RIO's current Northern and Southern offices will become a part of the Northern and Southern Districts, respectively.

**Deployments/Redeployments:** Deployments: **David Sheryak**, MVP, 25 Jan; **Darrell Johnson**, SWL, 25 Jan; **Diane Hobbie**, POA, 25 Jan; **Dennis Thomas**, SWG, 25 Jan; **Daren Brown**, SWF, 25 Jan; **David Steele**, SWT, 25 Jan. Redeployments: **MAJ Erik Nelson**, SWG, 19 Jan.

## **Vignette: Russell Holeman**

Article and photos by Carolyn Vadino  
(Holeman returned 6 Dec 03)

If you were to travel past the British security checkpoints at the gates of the Basrah International Airport in Iraq and turn into the clay and rock entrance to Camp Pioneer, you'd have a difficult time finding Russell Holeman, the area engineer, during the day. You may luck out and knock on his white trailer where he works and lives and find him transcribing notes. Or you may catch him during the nightly 7 p.m. meetings where his staff of 20 gathers to discuss significant activities. But your best bet to catch this man on the go is to drive to a site like the Basrah Refinery, or head north to the Rumaila oil fields.

"My primary job is to manage the contractor and coordinate with oil companies to get work accomplished," Holeman said. "I try and keep everything flowing in the same direction."

And work is flowing from the four major oil fields, all the way south to the ports in Khor Az Zubayr. Corps work is even flowing about 60 miles into the middle of the Arabian Gulf at the two offshore loading terminals. In all, Holeman oversees his staff in the rebuilding of 556 key pieces to the Iraqi oil infrastructure; three refineries, 40 gas oil separation plants (GOSP), six major pump stations, three major gas handling facilities, two water systems; two offshore loading

terminals and 500 oil wells. Which can explain why he is always on the go and has logged at least 50,000 kilometers on his land cruiser.

In his office, and thanks to the Corps very own geographic information system, there are maps taped to the wall that depict all these facilities. A giant status board lists all the ongoing work, contractor information, and notable activity—what needs improved, what is functioning, and more importantly, what isn't.

"We have definitely made a lot of progress. We have facilities that are operational now and several that are close, like the NGL plant," he said gesturing to the breakdown on the wall behind him. "I have to step back periodically and look at how much progress we have made. I get so wrapped up in the day to day that it doesn't seem like we are going anywhere."

Stepping back to July would find Holeman in an entirely different country, in entirely different living conditions. At Camp Commando, Kuwait, he lived in 20 man tents and endured temperatures well over 120 degrees.

"It was very long days, with the lights coming on at 5 a.m. and shutting off around 10 p.m. with long daily drives into Iraq," he said. "Getting accustomed to actually driving in Iraq was interesting. You never know when a dump truck will be coming at you head on in the same lane," he said laughing at some of his first-hand experiences.

Throughout this entire mission, Holeman has found himself in interesting and challenging situations. He has traveled north to Baghdad for meetings, driven the Iraqi Oil Minister around, and had a dinner meeting in downtown Basrah with the heads of the Iraqi oil industry.

"It was unique being in a two hour session and not understanding anything going on," he said laughing. "The entire meeting was in Arabic, and I was fortunate that an individual from the southern oil company was taking the time to help translate. James Holder and I were the only Americans. I definitely felt isolated and didn't know what was happening, but was able to tell that the oil minister was trying to present the vision."



Holeman makes his rounds to the job sites to identify items that may need fixed and also to monitor progress. Prioritizing the issues has been one of his biggest challenges; with enormous amounts of work needed at most of the sites.

"We aren't totally renovating," he explained. "Right now, we are trying to put a band-aid on to get the sites operational and functional. It will be interesting to see the long-term repairs. With guidance, the Iraqis will eventually be able to handle it."

In the future, Holeman believes the major oil companies can help provide professional advice on how to optimize the system. The Corps along with the contractors can provide the contracting and construction expertise during the transition.

"The Corps is pushing hard right now. While some aspects aren't coming along as fast as we would like, we are still helping the Iraqi oil industry—we are producing and exporting," he said. "Now, we have money coming in through exports which is a key aspect to what we are trying to establish here."

Holeman attributes success to repairs like the improved loading arm at the export terminal. Additionally, he believes the overall project success, so far, is due to the true partnership that the Corps, contractors and Iraqi workers have formed.

"During my time here, we have developed a teamwork approach. The teams are composed of members of the Corps, the contractors, and the Iraqi oil companies," he said. "This is a true team project effort."

While he has seen many changes and accomplished a lot during his deployment, he would like to see certain plants, like the LPG facility and the water injection plant operational before he returns to the United States.

"We set a goal to get LPG product within the country, so the Iraqis could supply their own cooking fuel so they don't have to import product."

But at the end of the day, Holeman is happy with what he has achieved as area engineer.

"I saw this deployment as a challenge. My goal was to try to handle everything as best as I could. Fortunately, there weren't many distractions or outside activity; I was either working or sleeping," he said. "It has been years since I was involved in construction management. I looked at the overall program and saw a lot of activity for a short period of time; hopefully we are making a difference in what we are doing."

Holeman, who achieved the Meritorious Civilian Service Award and a Commander's Coin for his work here, returned to Tulsa in time for the holidays.

"My daughter was upset at first, that I decided to come here, but we talked and through email we have stayed in touch," he said. "I missed my daughter perform on the varsity pom-pom squad for the first time, but I will be back in time to take her to the state competition."

Holeman has been with the Corps for more than 22 years, working on various water projects including flood control and flood studies on areas throughout the state. Currently, he serves as the Chief of Hydrology and Hydraulics at the Tulsa District.

**Previous editions of RIO Updates are available at <http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/iraq/RIOupdates/RIOupdates.htm>; and to read vignettes on other team members, please see <http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/iraq/vignettes.htm>.**

**"HOOAH!!"**

*Robert Crear  
Brigadier General, US Army  
Commanding  
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